

The Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta* L.) — Some Observations

By A. ARCHER-LOCK*

On the 4th November, 1977, not less than ten Red Admirals were observed in the area of Plymouth Central Park allotments, mainly feeding on ivy flowers, accompanied by one Comma (*Polygonia c-album* L.) and numerous wasps. Amongst them was one large female, easily identified by a circular rub patch on her right forewing. By 8th November, only two remained, including the wing rubbed specimen which, for simplicity, we nick-named Amy.

On 12th November, Amy was found amongst nettles, appearing feeble after a period of very stormy weather, but revived in the sunshine to fly strongly, although not visiting the nearby Hebe bush still amply in flower. The weather was extremely windy. Amy was next seen on 19th November after a period of very rough cold weather which had included gales, hail and frost. On the 20th, she arrived on the Hebe bush at 11.10 a.m. to feed for several minutes before basking on a vertical white stone.

The 21st was a day of sunshine and furious gusts of wind, with a maximum shade temperature of 42°F. Amy again visited the bush periodically to feed in spite of the cold northerly wind, with snow on Dartmoor. The following day, the visits were repeated, but the butterfly seemed less at ease, constantly changing basking spots. A cloudy spell prompted her to fly high into an ivy-covered tree at noon, but moments later, with the re-appearance of the sun, she again dropped down to bask in an ideal nook. Ten minutes later, Amy rose, flew along the hedge bank, and away through a gap between the trees, her whole action being decisive and purposeful, as for a bird returning to a nest.

24th November was another bright day of manic wind gusts. Amy was feeding on her bush at 10.50 a.m. At the end of the morning, as storm clouds gathered, she rose very high into the hostile wind and made for a small group of naked old pine trees, again with a sense of real purpose.

The morning of 26th November was brilliant but cold. The shade temperature under the Hebe bush, where frost lay thick white, was under 40°F. at 10.58 a.m. when Amy arrived to feed. Although strong on the wing, she was obviously ill at ease and restless. Shortly afterwards a robin made a determined effort to take her. She escaped, but was not seen again, so may well have been caught shortly afterwards. Strangely enough, another Red Admiral was seen in this same corner of allotment on 15th December, basking at length, but making no attempt to feed. On this same day, two more were seen in Bickleigh Vale, near Plymouth.

It is well known that the female of this species does occasionally survive the winter, and the writer watched a faded specimen feeding on Pussy Willow catkins on 12th

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March, 1977, in Plymbridge Wood. Amy provided good evidence of the hardiness of this butterfly. It was interesting to note how she kept to a selected number of basking points, nearly all vertically faced white objects ranging from slabs to plastic fertilizer bags, and enjoying a sheltered micro climate. Apparently no post-hibernated females have been known to lay in this country, the males having long since succumbed, but on 11th November at Padstow, the writer watched a male and female basking together and briefly toying on the wing.

Incidentally, these observations arose indirectly from a successful attempt to see a separate (used once only) species of butterfly for each month of 1977, and which started with a Peacock (*Vanessa io* L.) drinking moisture from a rock face before fluttering back to the hibernation drain pipe on 28th January. On 15th December, a Brimstone (*Gonepteryx rhamni* L.), Comma, and three Red Admirals were seen on the wing and basking, and a Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae* L.) had sunned on the 14th. So for those whose winters are full of gloom, there is more about than most books would lead us to believe!

A FURTHER PLEA FOR "AUCTORUM". — Charles F. Cowan (89: 67) has provided a very sensible argument for retention of the general conventions in the literature for the use of "auctorum", and perhaps another historian and bibliographer of entomology may be allowed to offer a further opinion. Cowan has stated that "these conventions, perfectly clear and very convenient, have been internationally understood for centuries. We ought not to confuse the literature by changing them. If we do not like the conventions we should not use them".

Historically, this judgment is sound beyond doubt. Even the occasional Latinist will agree with Col. Cowan's doubts as to the precise linguistic accuracy of these past conventions, and I need not call attention to other slight mistakes in Latin still in general taxonomic usage. Yet, the sort of change which Col. Cowan fears would indeed seem needlessly confusing to many. Errors must be generally abhorred, but unless changed by fiat, let us continue in those *firmly* established traditions which have been assimilated into zoological Latin. — Dr. R. S. WILKINSON, The American Museum of Natural History, New York, New York 10024.

CYCLOPHORA PUPPILLARIA (Hb.) IN BERKSHIRE. — A specimen of this uncommon migrant was taken on the night of 24th/25th October, 1977 in the Museum's light trap which is operated at Caversham, immediately north of the Thames at Reading. The specimen was of the pale type form. — B. R. BAKER, Museum and Art Gallery, Blagrove Street, Reading, Berkshire.